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A. S. FRENCH TO DAVID W. HARBOWER.*

“Duck Point”, La.,
April 6th, 1863.

D. W. Harrower,

Friend David:

After a long silence I again resume my pen and ink, which I find under the circumstances, the best substitute at hand for a good old-fashioned *talk*. If you could “drop in” some of these pleasant evenings to my tent, where I am surrounded with all the “weapons of our craft,” I could joyfully throw down the “mortar & pestle” and live again the days of old. But I dare not indulge in such speculative musings however agreeable they may be to me else I lose myself and be under the necessity of taking a *homeward trip* to recover my self-possession. At a certain sandbar a few miles below Helena, which has very felicitously been called “Camp Despondency”—“devil’s half-acre”—and other equally euphonious names, I received a letter from you dated Feb. 14th, in a box sent to Adjutant Abel, also one from Ed. with some tracts. Like mine to you it was a long while coming but nevertheless gladly received and *very* welcome. A few days after that upon the boat which brought us down the river another letter came bearing your familiar superscription, but only a few days old (mailed, Mar. 24th). It was a good long letter and I have enjoyed reading it and *re-reading* a number of times—may I often be thus favored. Our regiment, indeed our whole division, lay opposite the Yazoo Pass for two weeks—expecting to be sent down that way, but for some reason best known to our superiors our destination was changed and we were put aboard steamers and sent down the broad Mississippi—touching at Providence where the canal had been dug through to the lake of that name—we passed down to Transylvania landing fifteen miles below, where we disembarked and went into camp on as beautiful a spot of earth as I have ever seen in all

* Letter copied from the original manuscript owned by the Misses Smith of Springfield, Ill., nieces of Mr. Harrower.

my rambles in the south—it was on an immense plantation where almost countless acres were tilled by four hundred slaves all belonging to one man, (or rather his wife) for he, lucky fellow, came from N. Y. five or six years ago, not worth a competence hardly, but married a “beautiful, rich, and accomplished” young widow—heiress to five large estates all largely “stocked” with negroes. I said *lucky*, but take that all back, for don’t think from what I saw that he is by *any* means the *happiest* man alive. We staid there only 24 hours when orders came to embark again for a still more southern point. Down we came to Young’s Point five miles from Vicksburgh, Grant’s Hd. Quarters. We were encamped about two miles above that “Point” where we found dryer land, and here we are yet. We are alongside of the canal they are cutting through to a bayou leading to Red river. Our regiment has been at work with the spade once or twice since arriving here. It is a stupendous undertaking and there are from 3 to 5000 men at work on it daily—aided by immense steam dredging machines which throw out dirt by the cartload at a time. All is life and activity here and at all the principal points in this vicinity. We do not know anything more of what is transpiring in the immediate vicinity of the “doomed city” than you do. All is uncertainty, anxiety and expectation. Soon all of us may be called into scenes which try men’s souls.” We are in hearing of all the guns at V. eight miles distant, and every day and night hear their deep-toned, ominous echoes and reverberations as they are borne upon the wings of the winds. While at Young’s Point a day or two since I met our old acquaintance Geo. Reynolds—now holding a clerkship on Mather’s Staff—a good position with nothing to do but to enjoy oneself among the satellites of the “great ones”. He is looking well—has had no sickness—and thinks he is prospering finely. Speaking of old acquaintances reminds me that our former schoolmate Andrew J. Weber, now Lieut. Col., is in command of the 11th Mo. and in our division. He is a splendid officer, very popular with his regiment, and in the whole division, and has a well earned reputation for gallantry

throughout the army. From the beardless youth he has grown to be the calm—determined—efficient commander. He has grown taller and is quite slender but a fine figure—face covered with hair. Would to God there were more of the men in power of the stamp of character possessed by Col. Weber—*true to themselves*, their *country* and their God. Geo. Weber is also in that regiment as a 2nd Lieut.

David I have already brought this to a sufficient length, and have not yet alluded to your views upon the war and politics of the day. I can truly say that I admire you for the frank avowal of your sentiments and think you are *honest* in your belief. But *verily* it seems we were born to disagree on this subject. Had I time I might follow your reasoning and reply to your arguments, but it will avail nothing for we have freely talked these things over before and never arrived at any definite conclusions. I will only repeat what I have told you since the beginning of the war, and this belief has been strengthened every day since I have been in the service—I honestly and sincerely believe that the inhuman traffic in flesh and blood, called slavery, has received its death blow; and for the reason that it is in the way of, and an obstacle to, the establishment of the federal power in the rebel states, that it is in antagonism with every principle of justice—humanity and liberty; and as long as there remains a vestige of this evil in the land endangering the very life of the republic, and giving a foundation and chief cornerstone to a rebel government *let the war go on!* Spread desolation *everywhere*; let us all *die* or linger out a miserable existence, *crippled*—broken down in constitution—and even shut up in dungeons, rather than sacrifice our country and its honor on the altar of so deep, dark and damning an institution. I speak earnestly but honestly and in all candor, call it abolitionism or what you will.

The battle field has no charms for me, neither a hospital filled with suffering victims. I love peace, and all my longings are for its return honorably, when I may enjoy once more

the society of loved ones at the domestic fireside, with nought of strife or discord to mar our good feeling. God speed the day.

You refer in your last to certain complimentary notices in the city papers in regard to the "Hosp. Steward" of this regiment. I have not *sought* popularity, any more than to discharge faithfully what I conceived to be my duty; for *this* I deserve no credit—nor need I say that my name was paraded in the papers without my knowledge or consent, and by an unknown friend. But I must not weary you longer. I shall await with pleasure your reply to this, for letters here are like angel's visits. Remember me cordially to that "*handsome, gallant young fellow*" you referred to in your last, and to all other friends who may ask for me.

Write soon and believe me ever truly your friend,

ALVIN S. FRENCH.

D. W. Harrower Esq.
Springfield, Ills.

P. S. Our regt. is now in the 1st Brig.—3d Div. 15th Army Corps, under respectively Gen. C. Buckland Tuttle and Sherman. A.

A. S. FRENCH TO DAVID HARROWER.*

Division Hospital,
3rd Div. 15th A. C.

June 26th, 1863.

Friend David:

You may have imputed to me the charge of neglect or inconstancy, on account of my long silence after receiving *two* such long, interesting letters from you—and while I admit my actions might bear such a construction, I can say conscientiously I have no apology to offer further than a simple statement of facts which I doubt not will be all required by you.

* Letter copied from the original manuscript owned by the Misses Smith of Springfield, Ill., nieces of Mr. Harrower.

Of our march down through La. to Grand Gulf, out into the interior of Miss.—the taking of Jackson and finally our assaults on this place, you have long ere this had ample details and a repetition would hardly be of interest to you. The march was long and severe and I have not yet recovered my usual health since our arrival here. You at home can scarcely appreciate the boldness of the plan of taking such an army through such a stretch of an enemy's country without a base line of operations, and an exceedingly precarious line of communication. The excitement of the hazardous undertaking and the hope and expectation of *accomplishing* the object of the expedition carried the men through trials and hardships hitherto untried, and that too without murmuring. I do not love to dwell on the darker side of *any* picture, nor *do* I often say much on that subject in my letters home and for the reason that "loved ones" are too prone to *magnify* the sufferings of absent ones and uselessly grieve over them. The nearer you get to these "bugbears" the less frightful do they appear. We were on short rations most of the time and part of the time no rations. One evening I can now recall to mind when we were rather "hard up." We had marched all day on a few mouthfuls of "hard tack" for breakfast and no dinner. Night found us exceedingly weary and somewhat hungry, but what was to be done? The "*larder*" was empty as our *stomachs*! One of our mess appeared while we were deliberating and lo! a "measure" of meal or cracked corn was in his hand causing visions of *mush* or "hasty pudding" in our eager imaginations. But where's the kettle to boil it in said one, we have no vessels? An old oyster can was produced out of which a *mush* pot was constructed. The *mush* is made but how are we to *eat* it—no knives or spoons—just beside our campfire stands a dogwood tree the bark of which readily peels—and soon *bark spoons* begin to multiply and of an excellent quality too. At this point in the proceedings some one presents us with a pint of molasses. *Mush and molasses!!* Talk not to us, O epicure, of the joys of luxurious living and choice viands! We ate our simple meal with as thankful

hearts and keen a relish as ever did prince or princess, and then throwing ourselves down on our grassy couch beneath a tree were soon asleep, living again in the familiar scenes of home, or fighting in dreamland the battles of our country.

Through five fearful days of conflict before Vicksburgh I was with regt. on the field, when I was ordered to report for duty here in our Div. Hospital. Since then the regiment has been sent about eight miles in the rear to hold a certain cross-roads and I tried hard to get off and rejoin my regt. and succeeded one day in getting Dr. Lucas, Div. Surgeon to release me. I got all ready to go, started my baggage, when I was hailed by Dr. L. and told that he *could not* get along without me, as he had ascertained in the few hours I had been off duty. There are in our hospital about four hundred patients from our Div. and your humble servant is chief steward of the Dispensary. The Col. and the regt. are importunate in their entreaties for my release and I am equally anxious to go. While it is pleasant to know one is appreciated and well-thought of, it is at times a great bore. I am happy, David, in knowing that I have many ardent friends in the service—indeed it nearly always happens that friends rise up around me in every strange circle in which I am thrown. God has been very good and kind to me all along my life's course thus far, tho' I am conscious of my lack of merit and daily shortcomings.

30th—I had written thus far when taking a notion to go out and *visit* the regt. if nothing more, I obtained permission, and started in an ambulance expecting to return next day. Just after getting out to the encampment I was taken quite sick, much worse than at any time since I have been in the service and was obliged to give up entirely and go to bed. With good attention however I was up in three days and have just reported back for duty, tho' still very weak—hope soon to be able to say “Richard is himself again.”

Out on the road between here and the “Big Black” I saw some of the largest peach orchards I *ever* saw and all loaded

down with fruit—some of which was just ripe and you may know I *indulged* to some extent in that luxury. The woods are full of blackberries, plums and all kinds of wild fruit. Having naturally an ardent appreciation of nature in her manifold developments there is a charm about Southern growth, wild in particular, which I have never experienced elsewhere. The forests of Live Oak, Magnolia, Gum, Elm, and many other more familiar trees, are truly grand and imposing, and scarcely possible does it seem to me for an immortal being to contemplate such scenes without having his thoughts and aspirations drawn from “nature, up to Nature’s God.”

David you know not how often I have read and *re-read* your “*minutes of the Bachelor Club*,” nor with what intense delight, or rather *joy*, I pondered o’er the scenes referred to in your letter. *Verily*, “within the sacred precincts” of our Brotherhood have we passed some of the happiest moments of our existence—and not alone of pleasure did we think while we were spending our leisure hours together, for *I* can look back and remember as a result of our associations some of the best resolves of my life, and which yet linger with me urging me *on* to a higher and better life.

Had I time I should like to give you some description of the siege of Vicksburg, and the stupendous systems of works with which Grant is surrounding it and approaching towards it. I was all thro’ the works a short time since and they are truly wonderful. There are trenches and winding causeways dug clear up to the enemy’s forts—I went up to the rebel fort, which was blown up a few nights ago; it is on a very high hill—the highest around the place, and from there I had a splendid view of the city, everything being nearly as distinct as Springfield would be from the cupolo of the College. I did not tarry long there for the rebels now and then kept throwing over hand grenades rendering it rather “unhealthy” for Yankees. Every hill around is bristling with our cannon and all day and all night long the heavens and earth quake

with resounding arms. God speed the end—'twill not be long now. We have no fear from Johnston in the rear for we have an army of no small size out there to meet him. But I must close—Do not fear to write too often nor too long letters—for I am lonely here—I have not many leisure hours. With much love to you and the "Club," I am

Yours,

A. S. FRENCH.